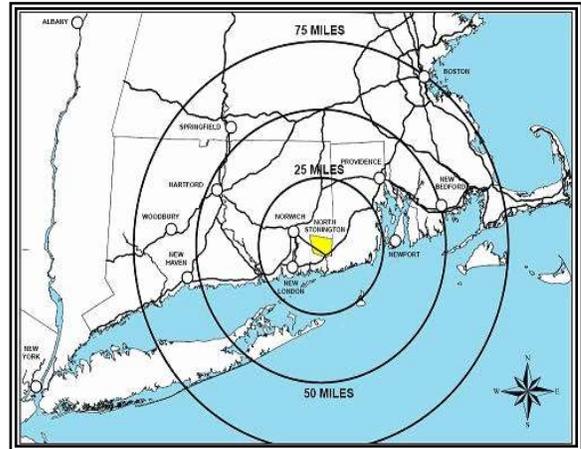


# 4. Planning Context and Opportunities

## 4.1 Physical Characteristics

North Stonington is approximately 56 square miles, making it one of the largest towns in Connecticut, but has only slightly more than 5,000 residents. The land itself was sculpted by glaciers as evidenced in part by the many hills and valleys as well as the plentiful stones from which the town derives its name.

A significant percentage of the town is forested, and together with the abundant farmland and open space, provides wildlife habitat and contributes to the



Scenic Vista and Stonewall



tranquil beauty and rural character North Stonington is known for. The 55 miles of stone-walls are also evidence of an agricultural heritage that continues today. Scenic roads that once traversed the farmland to connect distant villages now connect scattered homes and residential subdivisions that have begun to replace farmland.

North Stonington has abundant water bodies including several small lakes, and a network of ponds, streams and wetlands. The Shunock River travels through the Village and the Green Falls River forms a portion of the town’s southeastern border with Rhode Island. The abundant water and regulated wetland soils, as well as ledge outcroppings, severe slopes, and flood plains form considerable constraints to development throughout the entire town. Areas most favorable for development often coincide with the areas of good agricultural soils and are found in the southeastern and south central parts of town.

## 4.2 Population Trends and Potential Impacts

North Stonington’s population has grown over 6% in the last decade as compared to only a 2% growth between 1990 and 2000. This rate is slightly higher than the state and New London County’s growth rates of 4.95% and 5.78% respectively. North Stonington’s current population of 5,297 is projected to grow to only 5,505 (a 0.8% annual growth rate) by 2016 (2011 CERC estimates).

The growth may be attributable to the close proximity of regional jobs and local attributes that make North Stonington attractive to new households with children/families. The broader picture however, reveals that North Stonington is an older and aging community. Census data shows that 42 percent of North Stonington’s 2010 population was 50 years of age or older, with another 30 percent between 25 and 49. In other words, 42 percent of the population is already of retirement age or approaching it.

An aging population will greatly affect future planning decisions related to housing and lifestyle needs, and could have fiscal consequences if there is a need for greater services despite a corresponding decrease in residential tax revenues.



Single-family Residence in North Stonington

While North Stonington’s average household size used to be larger than the national average, trends show that the average size has shrunk from 3.42 to 2.58 persons. Additionally, the number of single-person households has risen to 17% in 2010 from only 4% in 1980. Therefore, the common household image of a couple with children is no longer as common as it once was.

| LIFESTYLE NEEDS            |  |                       |                       |                       |
|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Age Range                  | Needs/ Wants   | 1990 Share<br>(4,884) | 2010 Share<br>(5,294) | 2030 Share<br>(5,067) |
| <b>Infants 0-4</b>         | Childcare<br>Pre-school Programs   | 7%                    | 5%                    | 4%                    |
| <b>School Age 5 -19</b>    | School Facilities<br>Recreation Programs/Facilities  | 23%                   | 18%                   | 13%                   |
| <b>Young Adults 20-34</b>  | Rental Housing<br>Starter Homes<br>Recreation Opportunities/<br>Facilities<br>Social and Cultural Destinations<br>Employment           | 21%                   | 12%                   | 11%                   |
| <b>Middle Age 35-54</b>    | Starter Homes/Trade-up Homes<br>Family Programs<br>Services for Infants and School Children  | 32%                   | 33%                   | 23%                   |
| <b>Mature Adults 55-64</b> | Smaller Homes/<br>Second Homes<br>Recreation Programs and Facilities<br>Low Maintenance Homes<br>Social and Cultural Opportunities     | 10%                   | 17%                   | 15%                   |
| <b>Retirement Age 65+</b>  | Assisted Housing/<br>Senior Housing<br>Elderly programs/ Tax Relief<br>Social and Cultural Opportunities<br>Medical/Emergency Services | 8%                    | 15%                   | 35%                   |

Figure 1 - Source: 1980-2010 US Census; Projections by Planimetrics, Inc.

Census data also shows a significant loss of young adults between the ages of 20 and 34. The outmigration is often attributed *in part* to lack of employment and/or social opportunities and lack of rental or housing that is affordable. North Stonington’s housing stock is primarily single-family (93%) with very few rental units available.<sup>2</sup>

North Stonington’s small population and slow growth rate impact the town’s potential for commercial development. These “population deficiencies” (from the perspective of most retailers and personal service businesses or developers of retail/service complexes) are only somewhat offset by high traffic counts on I-95 and Route 2 since Casino traffic has not proved to be a viable market for most local business.

### 4.3 Other Trends and their Planning Implications

North Stonington’s median age is 40 years old and its ethnic make- up predominantly white. The residential density is 98 persons per square mile which is much lower than that of other towns. North Stonington also enjoys a much lower poverty and unemployment rate and much higher median income than the state median income and when compared to other towns in the region. Education attainment levels for college and beyond are also slightly higher than regional and state levels, often translating into the availability of skilled workers. Though school enrollment is low (only 795 students attend in the district), the average achievement test scores for high school students are well above the state average.

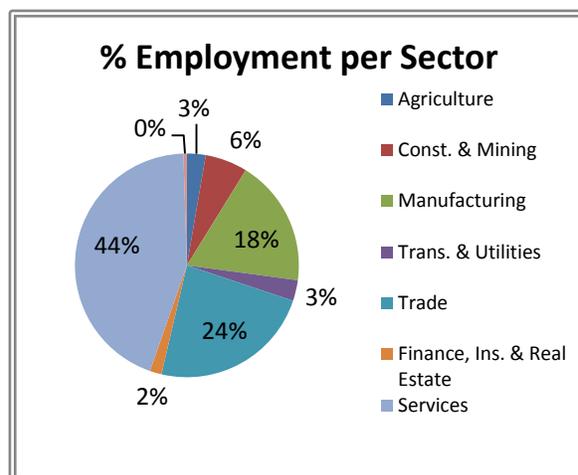


Figure 2 Source: 2012 CERC Demographic Analysis

### 4.4 2008 Recession and its Impact on North Stonington

The financial crisis that began in 2007 has impacted North Stonington and the Region in a variety of ways. Similar to most towns, North Stonington saw a slight rise in unemployment rates and in the number of foreclosures. The number of new homes being built dropped off sharply and coupled with a lack of any significant new commercial development, ultimately caused a decrease in the grand list. The town’s economy has also been affected by regional issues. In recent years, a number of significant employers in the region, such as Pfizer, have downsized significantly. Revenues that went to affected towns from the once very profitable Casinos have decreased. The recession has also caused a decrease in the amount of state and federal funding for municipalities causing some budget constraints. North Stonington is certainly not unique in its financial hardships caused by the recession.

---

<sup>2</sup> For further demographic information, please see the 2012 CERC Town Profile in Appendix B as well as the demographic profiles included in the recent Economic Development Action Plan and 2012 Housing Plan.

What the slow economy *has* given the town is time to update plans and revise regulations and to engage

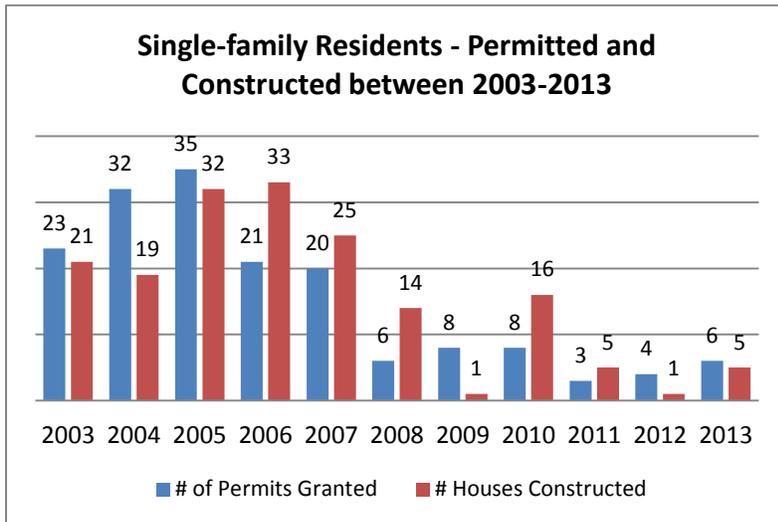


Figure 3 - Source: NS Permit Tracking

in planning to better prepare for new development when the economy recovers. On a positive note, despite the national economic downturn, North Stonington has actually seen considerable commercial activity in the last several years. Many vacant or underutilized sites have been renovated such as the new landscaping business and renovated warehouse in the Village Commercial Zone; the renovations to offices and manufacturing complex at the Rotary; Buon

Appetito (a renovated restaurant) opened in the former Dew Drop Inn property that had become an eyesore; Stonington Steel relocated to town from Stonington; Gourmet Galley expanded and located in a vacant building along Route 2.; and several new businesses have opened in the Holly Green Plaza and Circle Park II commercial complex. In the Highway Commercial Zone at Exit 93, the truck stop and the small commercial building that houses the Subway Sandwich Shop were both renovated; Dodson's Boatyard expanded its boat storage facility; and the Mobile Station upgraded its facility to include a Dunkin Donuts. The town also boasts many new home occupations, and two new daycare facilities.



Renovated Properties near the Rotary (above) and at Exit 93 (below)



The town itself has invested in some of its facilities: most notably the recent renovation of the recreation area on Rocky Hollow Road; upgrades to the transfer station and town garage; and the upgrade of the electrical substation to increase capacity. Adding to town amenities is a new community garden on the Hewitt Farm and a privately owned little league field. The Town also accepted 100 acres of donated land off of Wintechog Hill Road for possible housing development, open space/recreation, or a combination of both.

North Stonington is a resilient town and residents, commission members, volunteers and elected officials continue to work towards creating a sustainable future despite the obstacles presented by the challenging economy.